

BRECHT'S 'GALILEO' BOWS ON THE COAST

Charles Laughton Plays Title
Role at Los Angeles Debut
of Drama on Scientist

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LOS ANGELES, July 31—One of the current theatre's most-talked-of projects, Bertholt Brecht's "Galileo," a dramatic biography of the seventeenth-century scientist, had its première last night under the auspices of John Houseman's Pelican Productions, with Charles Laughton in the starring role. It is planned to move it to Broadway in a month.

A T. Edward Hambleton production and the second Pelican offering at the bandbox Coronet Theatre, it is an elaborate piece, with fifty actors, thirteen scenes, occasional music by Hanns Eisler and choreography by Lotte Goslar.

Staging is by Joseph Losey, long a disciple of Mr. Brecht's novel ideas on dramatic presentation, who invoked some of them for his late New York Federal Theatre living-newspaper productions. Artistic settings by Robert Davison are in the abbreviated, implicit Shakespearean mode and are altogether pleasing. Scene changes are executed with a small boy manipulating a flimsy sub-curtain, and most of the scenes are introduced with brief lyrics by three boy sopranos.

Conflict With Public Mind

The theme of the production is the topical one of science's conflict with the public mind, slow to grasp the significance of momentous discoveries, quick to debase them, and adamant against those which shake established beliefs and ways of life. In "Galileo," this resistance is epitomized in the attitude of the Catholic Church.

Through the episodic living-newspaper technique, "Galileo" traces the genius' life and vicissitudes. His discoveries, notably those exploding dogma concerning the solar system, are depicted as threatening the established feudal social order; the church, at first supercilious, becomes alarmed. Galileo, under the Inquisition, recants his "heretical" scientific theories. He ends his days under virtual house arrest, pursuing his research secretly.

Mr. Laughton, who worked more than two years translating the play from the German in which Mr. Brecht wrote it in Danish exile, makes the scientist an appealing human figure. He is devoid of pretension, amiably contemptu-

ous of the fetters that bind the popular mind, devoted to pure science, and, altogether, heroic while professing to be a coward.

Production Falls Short

The production, however, somehow lacks the impact implicit in the story. It seems barren of climaxes and even sparse in stirring moments. Hardly a sign of sympathy is inspired when Galileo's scientific determination cuts off his daughter's romance. His recantation comes out cut-and-dried.

Overly-zealous underplaying by Mr. Laughton and the entire cast, or possibly first-night letdown, and the script itself may have been responsible in part. But also it seems questionable whether the episodic technique is as facile a vehicle for a theme that is less expository than emotional. The ebb and flow of a human conflict is hard to present in small pieces.

Hugo Haas gave an outstanding performance as Cardinal Barberini and Pope Urban VIII. Other cast members were Frances Heflin, as Galileo's daughter, and Morgan Farley, as one of Galileo's philosopher antagonists.